

Theology Proper—Doctrine of God

The Nature and Knowledge of God

I. Who is God?

A. Definition: God is the supreme, living, holy, infinite (1 Tim 6:16–17), perfect, unchangeable spirit, who is the ruler over all and source, support, and end of all things.

B. God is subsistent (living).

- Jer 10:10, 1 Thess 1:9, 1 Tim 4:10, Num 14:28

C. God is supreme.

1. **God can do whatever he pleases** (Ps 115:3, Ps 135:6).
2. **God can not be thwarted** (Is 46:10, Dan 4:35).
3. **God works out his plan in this world** (Eph 1:11, Prov 21:1, Prov 20:24, Ezra 1:1).
4. **God has no rival** (Deut 6:4, 1 Cor 8:6).

D. God is spirit (Jn 4:24).

Definition: “God is spirit” means that God is one personal and active being without material substance.

1. **God is a real spirit.**
2. **God is a personal spirit.**

E. God is the source of all.

1. **Creator of all Rev 4:11, Gen 1**
2. **Derives nothing from men - Job 22:2–3**
3. **Gives men life and breath - Acts 17:24–25, Jn 5:26 (corollary)**
4. **Everything sourced in God - Rom 11:36**

II. Can I know God?

A. The proof of God’s existence

1. **God’s existence is never proven in the Bible; it is assumed.**
2. **There is no need to philosophically prove God.**
 - You will end up with a God of proof.
 - You will never convince the unbeliever of God. He must be “convinced” by God.

B. The knowledge of God’s existence

The biblical position is that the knowledge of God is innate and universal, and is not the result of formal reasoning or speculation. Everyone knows about the true God, but no one arrives at that knowledge via any “proofs” or system of natural theology based on argumentation or pure logic.

C. The discovery of God’s existence (Revelation)

We must use the Bible. In the Scriptures, the central affirmation is not that God is, but that *God has spoken*. If God has spoken, then of course He exists. And he, of course, expects his revelation to impact our lives.

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The Attributes of God ~ What is God like?

I. God is “understandable”

God can be known, but he cannot be fully known. God has revealed something of himself and his character/attributes in his Word. These attributes of God are how we know him and what he is like.

II. God's attributes relating to himself

God's attributes which respect the inner being of God. They are involved in God's relations to himself and belong to his nature independently of his connection with the universe.

A. God is Infinite (greatness)

- God is without *outside* limitations.
- Ps 40:5, Ps 71:15, Ps 103:12, 1 Kings 8:27, Rom 11:33

1. Self-existent (greatness)

- God has the ground of his existence in himself. He is independent.
- He exists by the necessity of his own being.
- *Ex 3:14, John 5:26, John 17:24-25*

2. Immutable (greatness)

- God is changeless in His being and purposes, and is incapable of growth or decay in any respect. God is “constant” in character and purpose.
- Ps 33:11, Num 23:19, 1 Sam 15:29, Mal 3:6, Heb 1:12, Heb 13:8, James 1:17b

3. A unity

- God is a unity of one essence in three distinct persons.
- The state or quality of being one. By this we mean (a) that the divine nature is undivided and indivisible; (b) that there is but one infinite and perfect God.
- There is but one essence in the Godhead, and this one essence wholly, equally, and eternally pervades each of the 3 person of the Godhead without division or multiplication. *Each person of God subsists in the essence. God is 3 person in 1 and the same essence.*

- The notion of 2 or more Gods is self-contradictory; since each necessarily limits the other. Infinity and absolute perfection are possible to only one.

The Father is God: 1 Pet 1:2

Jesus is God: John 1:1

Holy Spirit is God: 1 Cor 3:16.

God is a unity: Deut 6:4, Is 44:6, John 5:44, 1 Cor 8:4, John 10:30, John 17:22, John 14: 16-23

B. God is Perfect (greatness)

God is complete in Himself, lacking nothing (Job 37:16, Ps 18:30).

1. Truth (goodness)

- Truth is conformity to fact or actuality (AHD3). It is fidelity to an original or a standard (in this case God is the standard; thus, he conforms to himself, doing so perfectly).
- God *is* truth. He is genuine and consistent; he is what he appears and claims to be.
- All truth is founded in and derived from God.
- 1 John 5:20, John 14:6

2. Love (goodness)

- God is eternally moved to self-communication; however, love, in God, is seeking the highest good and glory of his perfections.
- God is attracted to Himself and is graciously displayed to Himself. He is charmed by His own loveliness; he delights in His own infinite beauty.
- 1 Jn 4:8, Jn 17:24

3. Holiness (goodness)

- Separation or apartness. It is the idea of moral purity; i.e., separation from that which is sinful, unclean, bad.
- God's holiness is a governing attribute, governing the rest of His attributes. It is the essential moral nature of God.
- Is 6:1-5, Ps 99:4-9, 1 Pet 1:15-16, Ps 89:35, Ex 15:11

III. God's attributes in relating to his creation

God's attributes seen in the outward revelation of his being. They are involved in God's relation to the creation and are exercised as a result of the existence of the creation and its dependence upon him.

A. God is related to Time & Space

1. Eternal (greatness)

- God's existence cannot be measured by time. The past, present, and future of God's existence is possessed by Him in one indivisible present.
- God transcends all temporal limitations and is without beginning or end; He is timeless.
- Gen 21:33; Deut 33:27; Ps 90:2, 102:11-12; Job 36:26; Rev 1:8, 4:8

2. Immense

- God is not limited by or confined to space. God is not in space. With creation space began to be, and God recognizes relations of space in His creation.
- Space is not a substance (nor an attribute), but a relation. It exists as soon as extended matter exists (creation).
- 1 Kings 8:27, Rom. 8:39

B. God is related to Creation

1. Omnipresent (greatness)

- God is in the universe, everywhere present at the same time, filling every part of it with His whole being.
- This does not mean that God is everywhere present in the same sense. He does not dwell on earth as He does in heaven. He is not in the wicked as He is in the saved.
- *Note on God's "localized" presence* (i.e. in heaven or believers): God's most special and glorious self-manifestation is in heaven. God's presence is everywhere but it is not manifested everywhere in the same way. He manifests His presence in believers uniquely so as to show they are His special possession.
- Ps 139:7-10; Jer 23:23-24

2. Omniscient (greatness)

a. Definition

- God's knowledge includes all things past, present, and future, immediately, simultaneously, and eternally, whether things actual or possible: God is all-knowing. God hold His knowledge in one act of timeless, eternal intuition.
- Ps 139:1-4; Prov 5:21; Matt 10:29-30; Acts 1:24; 1 Jn 3:20

b. Corollary. Wisdom (greatness)

- Knowledge applied—rightly. Wisdom is God's knowledge with moral purpose.
- Ps 103:24; Rom 8:28, 11:33, 16:27; Eph 3:10

3. Omnipotent (greatness)

- "Power" is the ability to produce effects. By His exhaustless power, God can do all things consistent with His nature and purpose.
- *God can do all the He wills, but He will not do all that He can.*
- Gen 17:1, 18:14; Job 42:2; Is 40:28; Jer 32:17; Rev 19:6

B. God is related to Moral Beings

1. Faithful: transitive truth (goodness)

- God's faithfulness is his trustworthiness to act in accordance with his word or promises. He is reliable. The idea is that if God is true in Himself He will be faithful to others.
- Deut 7:8-10; Ps 36:5; Ps 89:1,2,5,8; Ps 119:90; Ps 143:1; Lam 3:23; 1 Cor 10:13; Heb 10:23; 1 Jn 1:9

2. Goodness: Mercy and Grace—transitive love (goodness)

- God's goodness: God's *benevolent* concern for His creatures (Acts 14:17).
- God's mercy: His compassion, pity, kindness, tenderness, longsuffering, and gentleness toward *miserable* sinners. Deut 4:31; Ps 25:6; Ps 103:4; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 2:4-8; Ps 145:9,15-16; Neh 9:17-21
- God's grace: undeserved, unearned, unrecompensed, and unwanted favor toward *condemned* sinners. 2 Kgs 13:23; Rom 3:23-24;

Rom 5:17, 20; Rom 6:1; 2 Cor 12:9; Eph 1:7; Eph 2:8-9; Eph 3:7-8; Titus 2:11-12; Jam 4:6

- If sin had never entered the world we would know nothing of God's mercy and grace.
3. **Righteous and Just: transitive holiness (goodness)**
- Consistent with what is morally right; conformity to a right standard. Honorable and fair in one's dealings and actions.
 - Righteousness in God is the aspect of his holiness where his actions and attitudes are always in conformity with his own perfect being or nature. He, therefore, demands absolute conformity to this perfect righteousness in others.
 - Justice in God is the aspect of his holiness where he rewards conformity and punishes non-conformity to His perfect standard of right. God gives to man what is due him.
 - Deut 32:4; Ps 11:7, 145:17; Jer 50:7; Rom 2:6, 3:26; Gen 18:25; Ps 89:14; 1 Pet 1:17; Heb 6:10; Dan 9:14; 1 Jn 1:9
4. **Incomprehensible (greatness)**
- God cannot be completely known by a finite mind.
 - Note: God is not incomprehensible to Himself nor are the persons of the Godhead to each other.
 - This does not mean that God is unknowable. God does not need to be known exhaustively to be known truly and certainly.
 - Job 11:7-9, Ps 145:3, Ps 147:5, Is 55:9, Rom 11:3.

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Important Considerations Regarding God

I. Important distinctions of the Father

A. The Father's Specialty

- The Son and the Holy Spirit are considered in detail later, but we need to add a word here regarding the particular works of the Father.
- Almost everything God does involves, in some way or another, all the Members of the Trinity. So when we speak of the particular works of the Father we are not excluding the other Persons, but simply delineating those things which seem to be the prerogative of the Father in a special way.

B. The Father's Works

- The Father is the Author of the decree / plan of God (Ps 2:7-9).
- The Father is the Author in the act of election (Eph 1:3-6).
- The Father sent the Son to this world (Jn 5:37).
- The Father is the disciplinarian of His children (Heb 12:9).

II. Important ramifications of the Doctrine of God

There is no other God but the one we have been describing. Gods of our making, whether radically different from the God of the Bible or akin to Him, are false. Even good Christians can fall into the trap of trying to mold God according to their own thinking or wishes or pleasure. The result may be a god not dissimilar to the God of the Bible, but it will not be the true God.

We know God not because we can initiate or generate such knowledge, but because He has revealed Himself. Therefore, what we know does not come from our minds but from His revelation.

III. Important questions to answer concerning the Doctrine of God

A. If God is good, why does He allow evil in this world?

1. The source of evil.

God is good. God is opposed to evil. God cares about people. Sin exists due to Adam's choice. People sin, not

God. The ‘blame’ for evil in this world must fall on us, not God.

2. If God could prevent suffering, why does He allow it?

- The implication of this sort of question is that if all the objections about God’s existence were answered, then people would most certainly believe in Him. No matter how many objections are answered, there are always more that can be raised (1 Cor. 1:18). In the end, believing in God requires a step of faith.
- We must remember that God has a perfect plan for this world. Everything that happens in this world occurs for God’s glory and accomplishes his wonderful purpose. Moreover, as the creation we are not in position to question the Creator (Rom 9:20).

3. Is it prideful and wrong for God to seek to increase His own reputation?

- How can it be right for God to glorify Himself when Scripture discourages self-glorification as a form of pride (Ps. 115:1; 1 Cor. 1:27–29; 10:31; 1 Thess. 2:6)?
- The glory of God refers in Scripture to His reputation as made known and displayed through His attributes. God is glorified when His reputation is enhanced in the sight of others through the actions of obedient and submissive people.
- Jesus Christ glorified God the Father through His obedient life and completed ministry (John 17:4). Believers, too, can display God’s greatness and grace (1 Cor. 10:31).
- As Creator of the physical universe and all it contains, it is entirely appropriate for God to seek to display His glorious reputation (Ps. 29:1; 96:8).
- As God, He is worthy of this display. In seeking to glorify Himself, God is seeking what is rightfully His and belongs to no other. He said, “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols” (Is. 42:8).
- For more information see “Does God care about me?” below.

B. Is God fair?

- Paul’s main point in Romans 9:14–29 was that no one should complain that God’s elective purposes are unjust. Election is consistent with God’s work in history, with His sovereignty, and with the teaching of the Old Testament.
- From a limited human perspective election may seem to be unjust. But when we have questions about the justice of God, we must remember that God is holy, righteous, and just. He will do nothing contrary to these basic attributes.

C. Why would a good God condemn ignorant, unbelieving people to an eternity in hell?

1. Every soul will spend eternity somewhere

- Everyone will live forever either with Christ in heaven (John 14:3) or with the devil in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10, 15). Yet there are some who have questioned the traditional view that those who have rejected Christ will suffer the pains of an everlasting, fiery hell.
- We should share concern over this troubling issue (we must be concerned with giving the Gospel to lost souls). Yet we must be unwilling to allow personal compassion for those in judgment or for wishful thinking regarding the lost to deter our acceptance of a thoroughly biblical doctrine.

2. We must balance the truth of eternal punishment with the truths of God’s mercy, justice, and holiness.

- God does not want to send anyone to hell.
- He desires for sinners to repent and be saved (2 Pet 3:9).
- All creation testifies to the existence of a God who loves and cares for fallen humanity (Ps 19:1–6; Rom 1:18–21).
- Those who respond to this witness are given sufficient light to respond to the truth of Christ (Heb 11:6).
- Those who trust in Him will be saved (John 5:24; 6:37).

3. Because God is holy and just, He must judge those who have allied themselves with Satan in rebelling against their Creator.

- God takes no pleasure in passing a sentence of eternal judgment on any wicked sinner. Through the prophet

Isaiah, God said, “All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who continually provoke me to my very face” (Is. 65:2–3; see also Rom. 10:21).

- God is very patient with sinners, appealing for them to repent and be saved. But in choosing life without God they also determine their sad destiny—confined in hell for eternity, apart from God.

D. How do we reconcile the justice of God’s judgment with the love of God?

1. The question here is whether God’s attributes cancel each other out.

- We know that God is holy (Lev. 11:44–45; 1 Pet 1:16), and this attribute requires that He respond with wrathful judgment when confronted with sin and disobedience. The judgment He executes in responding to sin is just and right. It is never based on merely outward actions or superficialities but on the inward attitude of the heart (Is. 11:3; John 8:15–16).
- But in addition to being a God of infinite holiness, who must pour out His wrath on sin and disobedience, He also possesses infinite mercy and love (Lam. 3:22; 1 John 4:8–9).

2. So how can the justice of God be reconciled with His love?

- How can God maintain proper justice and still be merciful toward sinners? Paul answered these questions in Romans 3:23–26.
- All people have fallen short of God’s standard of righteousness and are subjects of His wrathful judgment.
- God’s wrath on sinners is serious and well deserved.
- If we fail to understand God’s justice, we will never fully appreciate the depth of His love.
- When people trust in Christ for salvation, God declares them righteous. They are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).

3. And so in the wonderful plan of redemption, neither God’s holiness nor His love are compromised.

E. To what degree is God involved in our daily experiences as Christians? Does God really care about me?

1. Most Christians would agree that God is involved in our lives to some degree or other.

- However, some see God as rather remote. They believe God created the world and then, besides occasional visitations and revelations, He allows it to run on its own. What happens in our lives, these people say, depends on us.
- Others see God more actively involved, providentially leading people along the path of life He has sovereignly determined.

2. The Bible affirms that God is actively involved in our lives, accomplishing His purposes through the exercise of His sovereignty.

- Paul wrote, “In him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:11).
- The word “predestined” means God has “marked out the boundaries” of our lives. The words “all things” indicate that God providentially determines all that takes place in our lives. Nothing is left to chance and circumstance. God is the “hand in the glove” of history, working through natural, human means to accomplish His purposes.
- The biblical answer is that God is fully involved (Rom 8:28–29). There is nothing in our lives that has not been determined by God’s sovereign decree.

F. If God is absolutely sovereign over us, shouldn’t He take responsibility for our sins and mistakes?

- No, because the sovereignty of God never abolishes the responsibility people bear for their actions. A good example of this is seen in the crucifixion of Christ. Peter said that Jesus was betrayed and crucified by “God’s set purpose” (Acts 2:23; see also Luke 22:22; Acts 4:28). But he also rebuked the godless people by whose actions He was sent to

the cross. “The God of Abraham...has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you” (3:13–14).

- The biblical teachings of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility must be kept in careful balance. In His absolute sovereignty God has predetermined all that takes place. But the sovereignty of God does not eliminate human responsibility for our actions. Sin and mistakes take place in our lives because of our own choosing. God, who is perfect and holy, is not to blame.

G. Does God have a sense of humor?

- The answer to this question depends on what is meant by “a sense of humor.” If this means does God likes jokes or should He be the object of a jokes, the answer is no. God is too holy and awesome to be trivialized as a cosmic Joker or the subject for joking. Jokes about God are disrespectful and in poor taste.
- We therefore must ask, what makes a joke a joke? Jokes are funny because of the surprise ending. In one sense God may to have a sense of humor only in the sense that He enjoys surprising us with something unanticipated; however, He Himself cannot be amused because He is never surprised. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows the punch line before a story is even told because He has decreed it to take place.

H. If God is all-powerful and unrelenting in His love, why doesn’t He answer my prayers?

1. God is not a genie

- Some people see belief in God as a way to get things, manipulate people, avoid unpleasant consequences, and maintain a certain level of happiness. And when God does not seem to provide these desired outcomes, they are disappointed and disillusioned.
- The main problem here is that such people have an inadequate view of prayer. Prayer is a means of communicating with God, expressing our love through adoration, confession, and thanksgiving. Yes, petition has its place in prayer. But the great prayers in the

Bible focus more on the development of spiritual qualities than on personal, material gain.

2. God is powerful

God can and does answer prayer. During my life as a Christian, I have seen God answer many of my petitions in ways that evidence His supernatural intervention.

3. God is wise and good

But if God is able to answer all our prayers, why doesn’t He do so? The following are five reasons why our prayers sometimes seem to fail.

- i. Sometimes God does not answer our prayers because *our faith is small* (Matt 17:20).
- ii. Sometimes God does not answer our prayers because of *sin in our lives* (Ps 66:18). There is no point in seeking God’s help if we are unwilling to acknowledge known sin.
- iii. Sometimes God may not answer our prayers because of *irreconciled relationships* (1 Pet 3:7).
- iv. God sometimes *delays His answer* for a more appropriate time. In some cases it is not that God won’t answer our prayer, but that the answer will be given later, in accord with His timing.
- v. Sometimes God’s *greater purposes are accomplished through unanswered prayer* (2 Cor 12:7–8). Unanswered prayer may help us learn of Christ’s sufficiency in a troubling situation (2 Cor 12:9).
- vi. Sometimes there is *no apparent reason* for God’s not answering our prayer. Yet, when an answer is not forthcoming, we have opportunity to demonstrate patience, persistence, and persevering faith—to the glory of God.